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AUTHOR Rocca, Kelly A.
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ABSTRACT

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Participation in the College Classroom:

The Impact of Instructor Immediacy and Verbal Aggression

Kelly A. Rocca

St. John's University

Kelly A. Rocca is an Assistant Professor at St. John's University, 300 Howard Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10301; (718)390-4586; Email: DrRocca@aol.com

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Abstract

This study examined the participation behaviors of undergraduate students. Much of the existing literature had focused on student variables in determining participation in the classroom. Here, the focus was on instructor variables instead. Students completed questionnaires and reported their own perceptions of their participation in class as well as their perceptions of their instructor's nonverbal immediacy and verbal aggression. Results indicated that students who perceived their teachers as higher in immediacy were more likely to participate in class. Students who perceived their instructors as verbally aggressive were less likely to participate in class. Limitations, implications for the classroom, and future directions for this line of research are discussed.

Participation in the College Classroom:

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Participation

Defining Participation

An immediate problem in assessing class participation is agreeing on ways to define and measure it. Melvin and Lord (1995) noted that "class participation ranks among the most complex and subjective academic performances to evaluate" (p. 258). The possibility of favoritism and bias with subjective participation evaluations has been noted (Armstrong & Boud, 1983). Lyons (1989) also noted that objective measurement of student participation is problematic for faculty who are attempting to gauge participation in the classroom. The teacher's own personal biases and feelings may impact his or her assessment of student participation (Armstrong & Boud, 1983). To avoid this, it has been suggested that teachers should have clear, explicit criteria stated to assess participation which should be given to the students at the beginning of the semester (Armstrong & Boud, 1983). There have been several suggestions for how this objectivity could be accomplished.

In one attempt to utilize an objective measure of participation, Lyons (1989) suggested using a method called the "BARS - Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales" approach (p. 36). These are scales, developed by students in each individual course, to assess participation and how they would rate themselves in regard to participation. To briefly explain this process, students are told about the importance of participation and then are asked to write down examples of good and bad types of discussions in class, which then are reviewed by other

colleagues, graduate students, or honors students to remove anything unclear or duplicated. Then, statements are brought back to the students to rank in order of importance. Students then are assessed on their participation based on what they have come up with, together as a class, for what is considered to be good class participation. Lyons (1989) proposed that this will allow students to feel the grading of participation is fair and to have objective standards by which to be considered.

In another attempt to classify participation, Daggett (1997), developed the "Evaluation of Class Participation (ECP) tool" to give students a checklist of what they were expected to do to earn participation points as part of their course grades. In the ECP, students give themselves 0-5 points depending on what they did to prepare for the class period as well as what they did to participate during class. They need to evaluate themselves and discuss any discrepancies with the teacher's evaluations of them.

With the goal of reducing subjectivity by the professor in evaluating class participation, Melvin (1988) and Melvin and Lord (1995) implemented what is called "the prof/peer method" of rating class participation. Created by Melvin (1988), the prof/peer method was designed to have both students and professors evaluate their participation performance. Peer ratings are seen as a "back-up" measure to those of the professor and are evaluated in a forced-distribution (high/medium/low participation ratings) approach (Melvin, 1988, p. 137). Student ratings were compared to professor ratings before a final participation grade was given. Intercoder reliabilities between students and instructors on the high/medium/low rating ranged from .83 to .90 across seven courses; professor ratings were quite similar to student ratings.

Cohen (1991) noted that class participation can come in many different ways and can take

a few seconds or an extended period of time. He also noted the importance of questions asked by students as participation. Wade (1994) considered the "ideal class discussion" as one in which almost all students participate and are interested, are learning, and are listening to others' comments and suggestions (p. 237). Armstrong and Boud (1983) noted that there are two main ways in which teachers can measure participation; they either can record participation each day in class, or they can wait until the end of the semester. The drawback of marking participation daily is that it may interfere with the chemistry of the class or the instruction, and the drawbacks of waiting until the end of the semester are relying on memory and the increased likelihood of biases (Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Hammer, 1995). Thus, Armstrong and Boud (1983) suggested to record participation at every other class meeting but not to tell the students when they will be assessed. The students would be aware that participation was a grading criterion, but would not know which days they would be assessed for their participation. Another possibility is to have other individuals besides the instructor assess participation, including outside observers, peers, or tutors in that subject (Armstrong & Boud, 1983). The drawbacks of this, specifically peer evaluations, are noted, however. Peers also may be biased or may not be qualified to assess others' participation. Armstrong and Boud (1983) noted that there is much room for future research in assessing classroom participation.

Reasons Students Do or Do Not Participate in Class

There are various reasons, both speculative and empirically supported, that students fail to participate in class. One reason deals with the size of the class, with students being more willing to participate in smaller classes than in larger classes (Berdine, 1986; Neer, 1987; Smith, 1992). Students often feel anxious about participating because they are speaking in front of a

large audience (Smith, 1992). Gleason (1986) also noted this in pointing out that "large courses inhibit communication" (p. 20). Gleason went on to indicate, however, that large classes are not something we can get rid of in our colleges and universities today. Thus, educators must find means to encourage participation, no matter what the class size is.

Another reason that students may choose not to participate in class is because of their personal fears of feeling inadequate in front of others, regardless of class size. Armstrong and Boud (1983), Berdine (1986) and Gartland (1986) all noted that students may feel intimidated or embarrassed and afraid of appearing inadequate in front of their classmates and choose not to participate because of these feelings.

This concern about being nervous follows closely with McCroskey's research (e.g., McCroskey, 1984) on communication apprehension. Individuals who may not be particularly high in communication apprehension as a trait are still frequently anxious about communicating in public speaking situations. Following from communication apprehension is a more context-specific classroom apprehension (Neer, 1987). This notion is defined as "avoidance of participation prompted by evaluation apprehension or expectation of negative outcomes associated with participation" (p. 157). Thus, students may not participate in the classroom because of a fear of speaking and being evaluated in that particular context. It is possible that the instructor contributes to this fearful environment and lack of participation by students. Neer (1987) found that students high in classroom apprehension feel anxious if the instructor stops talking or challenges them.

Berdine (1986) also found the instructor to play a role in whether or not students participate. Instructors who are considered "boring, bored, pushy, moody, close-minded, too

opinionated, condescending, and unfriendly" or "unskilled," meaning that he or she "doesn't know students' names, doesn't know students personally, and is more comfortable lecturing and asking vague questions" (p. 23) are likely to have students who do not participate in class. A climate where students and the teacher respect each other and the students respect one another is conducive to class participation (Wade, 1994).

Fassinger (1995) suggested that professors do indeed shape the classroom climate though they may not directly affect participation. She suggested that professors should begin each semester with activities designed to show students success right from the start in order to keep them participating throughout the rest of the semester. She also noted that if students are in a supportive environment and feel comfortable, they would be more likely to participate. It was also suggested that the more students know one another, the more likely they will be to participate because of the comfort factor. Fassinger (1995) also involved professors in her research and found that they perceived the most prominent reason for student participation was the climate of the classroom.

Gleason (1986) offered ways to encourage communication in large classes. The first suggestion is to make the large lecture hall feel small even if it isn't. This is related to the perceived physical closeness of immediacy, which will be discussed later. She explained how teachers should do things to make the room feel smaller by moving around, having teaching assistants help distribute hand-outs, and talking with the students before class. Gleason noted that making the space feel smaller will encourage the students to feel that it is a more personal environment. This ties in closely with her second suggestion of creating a "supportive climate" (p. 21) which has been noted above (e.g., Fassinger, 1995; Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Wade,

1994). Instructors can create supportive climates by knowing students' names (a part of verbal immediacy which is discussed subsequently), even if they only learn a few names in large classes. Another way to encourage this climate is by writing comments or giving students encouragement on their work. Although in courses with hundreds of students, not all students can receive comments, she suggested trying to reach a few students each time. Gleason (1986) noted that this type of environment will encourage participation among students and between students and teachers.

Even seating arrangement can have an impact on whether or not students participate in class. As suggested by Meer (1985), row and column seating does not promote discussion. A circular arrangement is suggested (Berdine, 1986). Having students sit at circular tables or in clusters of desks together, can help to promote discussion and participation (Rosenfield, Lambert & Black, 1985).

Several other student or classroom variables have also been found to impact whether or not students participate in class. For example, students who have not gotten enough sleep are less likely to participate (Berdine, 1986). Personality variables of the students also come into play. Extroverted students are more likely to participate than introverted students (Berdine, 1986). Students with an internal academic locus of control were found to be more likely to participate in class (Trice, Ogden, Stevens, and Booth, 1987).

Students who are young, inexperienced, and immature are less likely to participate in class, especially if they are surrounded by others who are not so young, inexperienced, or immature (Berdine, 1986). Similarly, the amount of experience students have with interpersonal and group communication impacts their participation in that the more experience they have in

those settings, the more likely they are to participate in class (Berdine, 1986). Also dealing with experience and comfort levels, Wade (1994) found that older students (22 or older) were more comfortable in participating and were more likely to participate than younger students (18-19 year-olds). No significant differences were found between 20-21 year-olds and either of the previous age groups. Older students also reported enjoying participating more than younger students.

Students who see themselves as minorities are less likely to participate (Berdine, 1986). Time of day and the temperature of the room also impact whether students will participate. They are less likely to participate in morning or night classes or in rooms that are either too hot or too cold. Along these same lines, classes over three hours in length and without sufficient breaks will decrease student participation. The specific type of participation (e.g., direct questions, comments, factual questions) that students are best at answering will impact whether they will participate or not, with all students favoring different types of questions (Berdine, 1986). The harder a subject is, the less likely students will be to participate (Berdine, 1986).

Berdine (1986) suggested that whether or not students participate depends on the amount of the grade that participation makes up, even though they may not be happy with the professor for having participation count as part of their grade. Thus, they will participate for their grade but may not be happy about it. Smith (1992) also noted that students should participate even in large classes where they would typically feel uncomfortable, if given the proper incentives, which usually involves their grades. Fassinger (1995) also suggested that grades are important enough for students to engage in participation. Based on her research, she suggested, however, that giving extra credit is more likely to work than counting participation as part of a student's grade.

Neer (1987), however, found that students high in classroom apprehension were more likely to participate if it were not counted as part of their grade.

Wade (1994) noted that even though students realize the importance of participating in class, they do not always do so. Students fear that their comments will not be good enough for the class discussion and therefore do not participate (Wade, 1994). If students believe their ideas to be important and worthwhile, they are more likely to share them with the class (Wade, 1994). Students were also found to be more likely to participate in discussions involving topics in which the students had interest or knowledge. Often, those topics were the same; the topics students knew about also interested them.

As far as advance preparation, students were more likely to participate if they were allowed to discuss the topic with another student or doing it as homework before discussing it with the entire class (Wade, 1994). Fassinger (1995) also suggested allowing students to prepare ahead of time, prior to discussion with the whole class. Neer (1987) found that students with high classroom apprehension also preferred having the topics discussed prior to their participation.

Kao and Gansneder (1995) looked at international graduate students and the reasons they are reluctant to participate in class. Kao and Gansneder (1995) noted the importance of interactions between international and native students to enhance the learning process for both groups of students, specifically that of participating in class with one another. One finding was that the students who were the most likely to participate in class were males from England, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada and the second most likely groups to participate were females from Asian countries in which English was the official language. Students least likely to participate were female Asian students from countries in which English was not the official

language. Overall, students from countries where English was an official language were more likely to participate than those from countries where English was not an official language. This is tied closely with the notions of feeling comfortable and confident in speaking in class. If students do not perceive themselves as competent speakers of English, it is not surprising that they would be reluctant to speak during class, given previous findings on the link between confidence and participation in class.

Kao and Gansneder (1995) noted reasons why international students were more or less likely to speak during class. The biggest reason for them not to participate was if they did not know the material well. Other reasons, which were similar to previous findings of non-international students, included: "negative classroom climate, problems with English, non-assertiveness, unfamiliar with discussion content, and speaking not required" (p. 136). These reasons seem quite similar to the studies noted previously conducted on traditional American students.

Student confidence was the most motivating factor, as reported by students for why they participate (Armstrong and Boud, 1983; Fassinger,1995). Wade (1994) also found confidence to be an important factor in whether or not students would participate in class discussions.

Benefits of Class Participation

Though students may not want to participate for various reasons, there is strong evidence for the benefits of participating in class and for the importance of it (Hammer, 1995; Lyons, 1989). Class participation is a way to bring "students actively into the educational process" and to assist in "enhancing our teaching and bringing life to the classroom" (Cohen, 1991, p. 699). Fassinger (1995) noted that both students and teachers can see the benefits of participating in

class, though teachers see the benefits as greater. Students learn better when they are prepared for class and participate in discussions (Daggett, 1997). Students are also more motivated when they participate in class (Junn, 1994). Students become better critical thinkers when they participate in class (Crone, 1997; Garside, 1996). The more students participated in class, the less memorization they did, and the more interpretation, analysis, and synthesis they did (Smith, 1977). Thus, students who participated more were more likely to engage in higher levels of thinking (Smith, 1977).

Garside (1996) likened active participation in classrooms to cooperative learning in which students are benefitted because they can learn from others, learn more about themselves, clarify their ideas, and perform better in the classroom. Berdine (1986) reported similar findings in that class participation has several benefits for students, including improved communication skills and better classroom learning, and for teachers, including the discussion of controversial subjects and a way to grade students. Similarly, Armstrong and Boud (1983) noted that participation in class can help students in interacting within groups once they are out of the college atmosphere.

The benefits of participating in class have even been noted at the elementary level. Pratton and Hales (1986) found that fifth-grade students who engaged in "active participation" scored better on posttests than students who did not participate (p. 211). Active participation was defined as "a result of a deliberate and conscious attempt on the part of a teacher to cause students to participate overtly in a lesson" (p. 211). Thus, this is a teaching strategy that engages students in participation. Students who had teachers who actively engaged them in their tasks performed better than students whose teachers did not actively engage them in participation.

Leeming, Porter, Dwyer, Cobern, & Oliver, 1997 also found that children in grades 1-6 who participated in a set of activities outside of class related to their class lesson were more likely to have a positive attitude toward that lesson than students who did not participate. Apparently the role of the teacher is important to consider in determining class participation in the K-12 levels as well as at the college level.

Pratton and Hales (1986) noted that "the most important conclusion to be set forth is the notion that the teachers can have positive effects on the learning of their students" (p. 214). Not much empirical research has been done on the specific role that the teacher plays in engaging students in class participation, and Pratton and Hales (1986) noted that further research on participation is required.

Instructors' Trials and Suggestions

Several authors of participation literature have offered their own suggestions based on what has worked in their classrooms and/or in individual studies they have performed. For example, Smith (1992) tried a novel approach to getting his students to participate during lectures. He required students to write down what they said or how they participated in class each day to help him accurately keep track of each student's participation. They were allowed a maximum of three credited participation efforts per day, though they were not told that there was a maximum per day. At the end of the semester, he gave the top participating students (three to five students total) a grade higher than they earned. Specifically, students who received a "B" would be promoted to a "B+" and so on. Smith (1992) found this technique to encourage two-thirds of his students to participate in class throughout the course.

Wilcox (1994) suggested that teachers could also allow students to go over their answers

with a partner or in a group before stating the answers directly out loud to the class. This is consistent with the notion of "wait time" to allow students to think of responses before the teacher allows anyone to answer (Tobin, 1987). It has been suggested that teachers should have a "wait time" of 3-5 seconds instead of one second as is typical (McDaniel, 1984).

Sprecher and Pocs (1987) suggested to get more participation in the large lecture class, students could meet for smaller weekly discussion sessions with former students who had performed well in the course previously. They proposed this for schools that desire smaller discussion groups but do not have the funding to pay instructors to lead all of the discussion sessions. Sprecher and Pocs reported that this worked well in the classroom during a trial period.

Gravett (1985) suggested that the instructor needs to ask the right types of questions in order to promote class discussion and participation. She proposed that out of the three types of questions that teachers could ask, (questions of fact, evaluation, and interpretation), the only ones sufficient to have a good class discussion are questions of interpretation because there are no right answers. She suggested that teachers ask questions to which they do not know the answers themselves and to ask students whether they agree or disagree with other students' interpretations. Similarly, McDaniel (1984) suggested that teachers ask questions that they cannot answer and to purposely wait for students to elaborate on their answers before the teachers make any comments about the students' answers.

Cohen (1991) discussed several activities for gaining participation in small classes but says that they could be adapted for larger classes by dividing students into groups or partners. The first technique he titled the "five-word game" in which he asked students to complete readings as homework and bring to class with them the top five words to explain the readings (p.

699). In class, words are written on the board and students explain why they chose the words that they chose. Cohen's rationale behind this activity is to engage even those students who are reluctant to participate since this strategy helps to get everyone engaged. He does this to encourage participation, active learning, and students' perceptions that they are in control of the classroom.

The second activity described by Cohen (1991) is a role-playing exercise in which students are asked to take the role of either the prosecution or the defense in court cases that are relevant to the course in a structured debate where all students participate. Similarly, Crone (1997) suggested implementing a weekly debate, where students read assignments and choose a viewpoint to take prior to the class time, in order to get students to participate in class. Another participation activity suggested by Cohen is brainstorming in which he encourages the students to come up with the list of items he wants to cover. For example, if he planned to teach about "ten benefits of class participation," he would have students come up with a list before he gave them his answers (Cohen, 1991, p. 701). He does this to encourage students to think and not just copy down the answers. They are creating and modifying their lists as a class.

McDaniel (1984) discussed the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in relation to student participation and what teachers can do to motivate students. These suggestions tie in closely with motivating students to participate in class. The suggestions are for teachers to allow for students to be successful, to emphasize cooperation over competition, to set high expectations, to get students to pay attention, and to ask questions in a way that promotes interaction (McDaniel, 1984).

Another technique called "pearls of wisdom" was created and used by Junn (1994, p.

385). The idea behind this was to have students record their participation and turn it in each day for the instructor to assess for their grades at the end of the semester. According to Junn's evaluation of the implementation of this technique and student reports, students enjoyed it, participated more because of it, and participated more in other courses because of the "pearls of wisdom" activity.

As suggested by these studies, there are several ways of increasing participation in the classroom. Wade (1994) suggested using a combination of approaches at the same time to encourage participation.

The Teacher's Role in Participation

While there has been a decent amount of literature assessing the domains of classroom attendance and participation, not much has been done regarding the teacher's role in enhancing or deterring student attendance and participation. Kelly (1989) noted the importance of having teachers encourage student participation. Wade (1994) commented that looking at the teacher is a good place to start. Wade (1994) noted that a primary reason for why students do not participate may be because of the teacher. Specifically, students were less likely to participate if their teachers did not pay attention to them, made fun of them, put them down, or were overly critical of them. Because these behaviors may damage the self-concepts of students, they could all be considered verbally aggressive behaviors.

On the other hand, students were more likely to participate in an environment where they perceived that teachers cared about them and had respect for them and their opinions (Wade, 1994). Wade (1994) noted that it is important for teachers to encourage students to be respectful yet critical, while at the same time seeing the value in their ideas. Encouraging participation in

one course may even lead to students participating in their other courses. This was found by Junn (1994) in that almost 70 percent of students who participated in her course because of her "pearls of wisdom" approach reported participating more often in other courses as well.

There are several characteristics of teachers that may encourage students to come to class and to actively participate while they are there. One such characteristic is that of being a good listener (Cohen, 1991). Cohen noted that teachers should listen to their students' comments and questions without judging them even if teachers do not agree with the comments or particularly want to listen to them. Other teacher characteristics include "enthusiasm and skills as a facilitator of discussion," which are both important in encouraging student participation (Armstrong & Boud, 1983, p. 35). Armstrong and Boud (1983) also noted that teachers who are supportive of their students can encourage participation. Beacham (1991) noted that teachers need to be patient in getting students to participate in class. Teacher communication and respect are "critical for getting students involved" (Beacham, 1991, p. 45). Teachers who are perceived as caring about the students, even if the teachers' expectations are high, are more likely to have students participate in class (Beacham, 1991). Professors who encouraged and praised their students had students who were more likely to participate in class and more likely to think critically (Smith, 1977).

Wade (1994) noted that the area of participation in the classroom is one worthy of further study. It has been found that one-third of students would like to participate more in class discussions (Wade, 1994). This is a rationale for doing future research to see how to get those students who are already willing, to actually participate in class.

Gender Differences

Wade (1994) found that males were more likely to participate than females and that males saw participation as more important and their own contributions to the class as more important than females did. This is not surprising given the findings in a recent meta-analysis on gender and self-esteem, in which it was found that females have lower self-esteem than males (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). If females do not think highly of themselves and are not confident, it makes sense that they would be less likely to participate in class, given the findings linking confidence to participation in class (e.g., Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Beacham, 1991; Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Wade, 1994). Crawford and MacLeod (1990) also found male students to participate more. Tannen (1992) noted that males may participate more in class because they have more practice in doing so. Wright and Kane (1991), however, found that females increased their participation in class when they were encouraged by the "women speak this week" program (p. 472). This experimental program allowed only females to speak in class during a designated week during the semester; males were not to participate at all.

Concerning gender differences in teachers, female instructors were found to create a climate in which students would participate more, but that was not as strong a predictor as class size was for climate (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990). They also noted that the differences between male and female teachers did not impact the amount of participation by male or female students. That is, the students participated regardless of teacher gender, but female teachers had a tendency to get both male and female students engaged more than male teachers did ($p < .05$).

Brooks (1982) reported somewhat different findings. Males were found to be more aggressive (as defined by interruptions) in class, regardless of teacher gender. Males also tended to be more assertive (as defined by "frequency and duration of speech") in classes where the

teachers were female (p. 686). There were no differences in assertiveness found between males and females in courses taught by males. Brooks concluded that these findings may be explained by considering that female professors may encourage participation more than male professors.

Woodward (1992) expected to find differences in the frequency of male and female participation and interruption, but these findings were not observed in her study. Given the conflicting findings on gender differences in participation, the first research question is proposed:

RQ1: Do males and females differ in their frequency of reported participation?

Immediacy

The concept of immediacy has received much attention in instructional communication literature over the past two decades. Numerous studies have been conducted using immediacy as a central or underlying concept (for a summary of the early research in this area, see McCroskey & Richmond, 1992). The concept of immediacy dates back to social psychologist, Albert Mehrabian in 1971. He defined the construct of immediacy in terms of his "principle of immediacy." This principle states "people are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian, 1971, p.1). Immediacy relates to approach and avoidance behaviors and can be thought of as the perceived distance between people (Andersen, 1978; 1979; Mehrabian, 1971). This social-psychological perspective suggests that positive affect allows people to become more immediate, while negative affect allows reduced immediacy.

Immediacy in the Classroom

While immediacy has received some attention from communication scholars interested in interpersonal and/or organizational communication, it has been researched primarily in the context of the college classroom, which is the area of concern in this study as well. Several studies have been conducted looking at immediacy behaviors of teachers during instructional communication with their students. These studies have found teacher immediacy to be associated with more positive student affect as well as increased cognitive learning and more positive student evaluations of the immediate teachers. This pattern of results has been observed both in the U.S. and in a variety of other cultures (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994; Kelley & Gorham, 1988; McCroskey, Fayer, Richmond, Sallinen, & Barraclough, 1996; McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer, & Barraclough, 1995; McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996; Richmond, 1990).

One critical study conducted on immediacy was done by Gorham (1988) where immediacy was found to be related to cognitive learning. Previous studies had linked immediacy to affective learning (Andersen, 1978; 1979; Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Kearney, Plax, & Wandt-Wesco, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986), but to this point, none had been able to show the link between immediacy and cognitive learning. This was mostly due to problems in measuring cognitive learning (Gorham, 1988, Kelley & Gorham, 1988; McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996). Gorham was able to connect teacher immediacy behaviors with student cognitive learning, once a successful way to measure cognitive learning was found. Cognitive learning was measured by asking students their perceptions of how much they learned. Specifically, students were asked to report how much they think they learned in the course on a 0-9 scale and to report how much they think they

would have learned in the course if they had the "ideal" teacher. Then, "learning loss" was estimated by subtracting the first number obtained from the second number obtained (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987, p. 581; Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, & Plax, 1987). Using this measure of cognitive learning, Gorham (1988) found that immediacy creates affective learning, or liking of the course content and the teacher, which then leads to cognitive learning.

Verbal Immediacy

Gorham (1988) assessed verbal immediacy. Verbal immediacy behaviors include messages that bring the student and teacher together. Some examples of verbal immediacy messages are using "we" instead of "I," using humor and personal examples while teaching, calling on students by name, and giving praise to students (Gorham, 1988). Thus, verbal immediacy behaviors are a very non-aggressive type of communication engaged in by teachers. Gorham's research seemed to set the stage for future instructional communication research on immediacy. Gorham (1988) noted that both the verbal and nonverbal aspects of immediacy work well together in creating a general atmosphere of immediacy. These together accounted for over 35 percent of the variance in affect and attitude toward the instructor (Gorham, 1988). However, the validity of the verbal immediacy scale has been brought into question (Robinson & Richmond, 1995). Robinson and Richmond (1995) concluded that verbal immediacy and nonverbal immediacy are not assessing the same construct. Verbal immediacy does not address the immediacy definition as proposed by Mehrabian (1971), whereas nonverbal immediacy does tap into that dimension. The original development of verbal immediacy was operationalized by asking undergraduate students what behaviors their best teachers engaged in. The problem with this approach is that the behaviors generated may have been "effective verbal behaviors, not

necessarily verbally immediate behaviors" (Robinson & Richmond, 1995, p. 81). Thus, the validity of the verbal immediacy scale is questionable. Accordingly, verbal immediacy should be noted, but it is not a primary focus in the present research. Much of the research conducted on immediacy has focused particularly on nonverbal immediacy, as will this study.

Nonverbal Immediacy

Nonverbal immediacy has been found to be linked to motivation. There appears to be a linear relationship between immediacy, motivation, and learning (Christophel, 1990). Students' state motivation scores were correlated with learning and immediacy. Thus, when teachers are immediate with their students, they create a more beneficial learning atmosphere where students are motivated to learn.

Christophel and Gorham (1995) noted that an absence of immediacy behaviors may influence motivation even more than the presence of immediacy behaviors in that the absence of the behaviors will demotivate students. This lends further credence to the notion that immediacy is not simply something that is an asset to classroom learning, but rather, immediacy by the teacher seems to be more of a necessity. The absence of immediacy seemed to have a greater impact on demotivation than the presence of immediacy did on motivation.

Immediacy also has been found to have an impact on recall of information (Kelley & Gorham, 1988). By increasing the amount of attention paid to the teacher and the content, the student is more likely to remember more information, due to increased cognitive learning. Kelley and Gorham use a four-step model to link immediacy to cognitive learning. "Immediacy is related to arousal, which is related to attention, which is related to memory, which is related to

cognitive learning" (p.201). This model works as a summary of the positive impact of immediacy in the classroom as found by previous researchers.

Immediacy is more than just being responsive to student needs and concerns (Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994). Thomas et al. found that immediacy is correlated with both assertiveness and responsiveness. More immediate teachers are higher in both of these areas. Thus, immediacy is not simply being responsive to students; there is more to it than that. In other words, immediacy is not "everything" in the classroom (Frymier & Shulman, 1995).

Immediacy also has been found to impact student compliance with teachers (Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Richmond, 1990). Kearney et al. found that students would comply more easily with immediate teachers than non-immediate teachers. They also found that the type of technique used, either prosocial (i.e., asking nicely) or antisocial (i.e., verbal aggression), to gain compliance affected the students' compliance. Specifically, they found that students would be most likely to comply with teachers who were immediate and used prosocial techniques. Richmond (1990) also found that teachers who used prosocial ways of gaining compliance had much greater affect with their students than those who used antisocial measures of compliance gaining.

Teachers who are immediate also have students who have greater affect for them (e.g., Gorham, 1988) and have higher motivation levels (Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995) than do non-immediate teachers. A classroom climate of respect and comfort has been found to increase student participation (Fassinger, 1995; Kao & Gansneder, 1995, Wade, 1994). Classrooms where students know and enjoy the material also have been found to have higher levels of student participation (Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Wade, 1994). The higher the level of

student participation in the classroom, the higher the amount of student learning that takes place (Daggett, 1997; Devadoss & Foltz, 1996; Garside, 1996; Junn, 1994; Kelly, 1989). Similar results have been found with immediate classrooms. Teachers who are immediate tend to have students who are motivated (Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995), and learn both affectively (Andersen, 1978; 1979; Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorenson, 1988; Kearney, Plax, & Wandt-Wesco, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986) and cognitively (Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988; Kelley & Gorham, 1988). Given the strong suggested link between participation and teacher immediacy, it seems plausible that immediate teachers would have students who participate in class more frequently than would non-immediate teachers. Thus, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between reported class participation and nonverbal immediacy.

To this point, teacher characteristics or behaviors which are socially appropriate and conducive to learning have been considered through looking at immediacy. Unfortunately, however, all teachers are not socially appropriate, nor do they have classroom environments that are conducive to learning. One area in which teachers may not meet these criteria is in the characteristic of being verbally aggressive.

Verbal Aggression

Conceptualization

Since its conceptualization, verbal aggression has received much attention in the literature (Infante & Rancer, 1996; Infante & Wigley, 1986), and much research has been done regarding verbal aggression. Verbal aggression has been defined by Infante (1987) as "using verbal and

nonverbal communication channels in order, minimally, to dominate and perhaps damage or, maximally, to defeat and perhaps destroy another person's position on topics of communication and/or the other person's self-concept" (p.164). There are several means of being verbally aggressive, including "character attacks, competence attacks, insults, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, profanity, threats, and nonverbal indicators" (Infante, 1987, p.182). All of these are methods of attack with potentially damaging effects.

Whether a message is perceived as verbally aggressive or not depends on four different viewpoints as proposed by Infante (1987, 1988). These include the perspectives of the individual, the dyad, an observer, and society. Verbal aggression may occur on one or more of these levels, which makes it somewhat difficult to define what is and what is not verbal aggression. Defining verbal aggression thus depends on which point of view is being considered. All of these perspectives are valid and depend on the circumstances under which the potential verbal aggression occurs (Infante, Myers, & Buerkel, 1994). When it comes to teachers' verbal aggression, then, it is important to obtain students' perceptions of their instructors.

There are several negative outcomes of this destructive type of communication. Verbal aggression can lead to short-term effects such as having one's feelings hurt, being angry, becoming irritated, and feeling embarrassed. Verbal aggression can also lead to long-term effects including the ending of relationships and self-concept damage (Infante, 1988; Infante & Wigley, 1986). Often, verbal aggression leads to physical aggression (Infante, 1988; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Kinney, 1994). It has been found that verbal aggression is destructive in interpersonal relationships between roommates (Martin & Anderson, 1997), marital partners (Rancer, Baukus, & Amato, 1986), siblings (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 1997), and coaches with their

players (Rocca, Toale, & Martin, 2000). Verbal aggression also impacts children once they become adults if their mothers were verbally aggressive while they were growing up in that children who grew up in this atmosphere are likely to feel less closeness and support in their romantic relationships (Weber & Patterson, 1997).

Causes of Verbal Aggression

There are several proposed causes of verbal aggression as a personality trait (Infante, 1987). One possible cause is called psychopathology, which is defined as attacking another who is a reminder of a past unresolved source of hurt. A second reason verbal aggression may occur is out of disdain for another or being frustrated, also known as the frustration-aggression hypothesis. A third reason for the occurrence of verbal aggression is the process of social learning whereby the verbally aggressive behavior of another is modeled. A fourth reason proposed to cause verbal aggression to occur is one's argumentative skill deficiency. Here, a person attacks another's self-concept because no skillful arguments can be thought of (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Any of these may cause instructors to become verbally aggressive in the classroom.

Verbal aggression is seen as a personality trait with situational factors becoming involved. This viewpoint considers each verbally aggressive act to be a product of the individual's personality as well as the situation (Infante & Rancer, 1996). For example, Infante, Riddle, Horvath, and Tumlin (1992) found that verbal aggression is more likely to happen when a person is in a bad mood, wants to get even, or wants to be funny regardless of whether or not the person was high or low in trait verbal aggressiveness.

Verbal Aggression and Immediacy

Comstock, Rowell, and Bowers (1995) noted that teachers who communicate in a positive manner with their students are thought of as more immediate and by doing so, they encourage student learning. This is incompatible with any type of verbal aggression in the classroom. Verbal aggression and immediacy seem incompatible because immediacy produces perceptions of responsiveness whereas verbal aggression does not. Rocca and McCroskey (1999) found this to be true. They found a negative relationship between nonverbal immediacy and verbal aggression in the classroom context.

Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that, while appropriate humor had a positive influence on learning, too much negative humor directed toward students or outside events led to negative affect. This type of humor may be perceived as verbal aggression. When teachers used too much of this type of humor, students said they would be less likely to enroll in another course by the same instructor (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that even teachers with high immediacy cannot get away with this type of verbally aggressive humor. Teachers with both high and low immediacy scores were perceived in a more negative manner if they used this type of negative "humor" often. This is further evidence of the destructive nature of verbal aggression in the classroom setting.

Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) found that offensive behaviors engaged in by teachers, including using sarcasm and putdowns, being verbally abusive toward students, sexually harassing students, and having a negative personality had a negative impact in the classroom and on student learning. Myers and Rocca (2000) noted that when instructors challenge their students verbally, students are likely to become defensive and perceive the instructor as looking down on them. This lends further support to the fact that verbal aggression

and immediacy are negatively related in the classroom setting. Martin, Weber, and Burant (1997) found that instructors who used verbally aggressive messages were perceived by students as less competent, less immediate, and less appropriate than those who did not use verbal aggression. Teachers who used verbally aggressive messages were also less likely to be hired for a teaching job in this experiment. Martin, Weber, and Burant (1997) concluded that it would be better for teachers to avoid using verbal aggression.

Verbal aggression is a destructive form of communication in several settings. Of particular interest here, verbal aggression has been shown to have a negative impact in the classroom setting (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999). In a classroom environment, students may not feel comfortable coming to class and may have their egos completely destroyed by participating in class. Students do not participate for fear of embarrassment (Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Berdine, 1986; Gartland, 1986; Neer, 1987; Smith, 1992), and being the recipient of verbal aggression has been linked to feelings of embarrassment (Infante, 1988; Infante & Wigley, 1986). Previous research has shown that teachers putting down students, which is one form of verbal aggression, is related to students not participating in class (Berdine, 1986). Seemingly, students who are fearful of being embarrassed by participating in class and who have a verbally aggressive teacher would probably not participate, and may not even attend class. Thus, a second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a negative relationship between reported class participation and perceived teacher verbal aggression.

Method

Participants

Participants were 189 undergraduate students in two large service courses at a large Eastern university. Participants had an average age of 21.13 with a standard deviation of 3.9 and were 52.4% male (n ' 99) and 47.6% female (n ' 90). Participation was voluntary, and students earned minimal course credit. Students were informed that they did not need to participate and that their grades would not be affected by refusal to participate. All students chose to participate and all participation took place during regular class time.

Design

Students were asked to complete a questionnaire based on the teacher that they had in the class just prior to the one in which they completed the questionnaire. Thus, students did not need to think back further than their last class period. The procedure used assures that teachers were from a wide variety of disciplines and that the courses were more diverse than if participants all completed the scales on the teacher in their current class. This procedure has been used successfully in many previous studies (Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Frymier & Shulman, 1995; Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Kearney, Plax, & Wandt-Wesco, 1985; McCroskey, Fayer, et al., 1996; McCroskey, et al., 1995; McCroskey, Sallinen, et al., 1996; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994).

Instruments

Participants completed the following instruments as well as demographic questions. A questionnaire was distributed with measures of (a) participation, (b) the 10-item Nonverbal Immediacy Measure (Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994), (c) a 10-item modified version of the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), and (d) demographic questions.

Three questionnaires which consisted of incomplete or inaccurate information (e.g., stating 52 classes were missed when there are not that many during the semester) were discarded.

Participation was measured as a one-item self-report measure by students on their frequency of participation in the rated course on which they were completing the questionnaire. Participation was defined as "any type of speaking up in class, including asking questions and making comments which is related to the class material." Students were asked how frequently they participated in the class (Likert-type item, ranging from almost always to almost never on a five-point scale). Self-report of participation was chosen for several reasons. First of all, since students were reporting on their perceptions of their teachers, it was logical to ask them to report on their perceptions of themselves as well. Second, Crawford and MacLeod (1990) noted that observing participation may affect the classroom climate and that instructors may not be willing to allow observers to watch their classrooms. Third, Hall and Sandler (1982) also noted the importance of collecting survey data in this area to rely on systematic evidence rather than relying on anecdotes. Thus, students were asked to give their own estimates of their participation in class for this study.

The Nonverbal Immediacy Measure (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) has been shown in numerous studies to be both valid and reliable. It has been found to be reliable for both students and teachers (Gorham & Zakahi, 1990). The Nonverbal Immediacy Measure has been found to consistently have good internal consistency reliabilities, of .70 or higher (Thomas, et al., 1994). The measure also has been shown to have good predictive validity between teachers and students (Gorham & Zakahi, 1990; McCroskey, Fayer, et al., 1996). That is, students could predict with accuracy their instructors' nonverbal immediacy ratings when student ratings and

instructor self-ratings were compared. The revised 10-item version was used in the present work because of previous studies in which four of the original 14 items were considered poor items (McCroskey, Sallinen, et al., 1996). The four items eliminated were those which included behaviors of sitting, standing, and touching. An example of an item from the scale is "gestures while talking to the class." Also, two items containing the word "smiles" were reworded to read "frowns" as recommended by McCroskey, et al. (1996). Obtained internal consistency reliability for the 10-item scale in the present study was .86.

The Verbal Aggression Scale has been found to be both reliable and valid in assessing verbal aggression (Infante & Wigley, 1986). In its original form, it was a 20-item Likert-type scale with response categories ranging from almost never true (1) to almost always true (5). The scale includes 10 positively worded and 10 negatively worded items. The version used for this study was worded in order to adapt the items to fit the instructional environment. The internal consistency reliability of the original version has been .80 or above in several studies (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Even when the scale was adapted for different contexts, it has been shown to have internal consistency reliabilities of .79 to .92 (Bayer & Cegala, 1992; Boster & Levine, 1988; Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Infante & Gorden, 1989). This is of particular importance here due to the fact that the scale used in this study was adapted to fit the teaching environment. It was adapted so that each item read "my instructor" rather than "I." Obtained internal consistency reliability for the 10-item VA scale was .89 in the present investigation.

Results

The purpose of this investigation was to assess the class participation of undergraduate college students. Specifically, the interest was in student perceptions of instructor nonverbal

immediacy and verbal aggression and how these variables predicted student participation. Two research hypotheses and one research question were formulated.

Hypothesis One predicted that there would be a positive relationship between reported class participation and nonverbal immediacy. Pearson correlations were computed to determine if such relationships existed. A positive linear relationship was found between frequency of class participation and perceived instructor immediacy, (r ' .17, p <.05). Thus, students who reported participating more in class perceived their teachers as more immediate.

Hypothesis Two predicted that there would be a negative relationship between reported class participation and perceived teacher verbal aggression. Pearson correlations were again computed to determine if such relationships existed. A negative relationship was found between reported participation and perceived instructor verbal aggression, (r ' -.19, p < .01). Thus, students who perceived their instructors as being verbally aggressive were less likely to report participating in class.

Research Question One inquired about the possibility of males and females differing in their frequency of class attendance and participation. T-tests were performed to determine if there were any differences between males and females for these measures. No significant differences between genders were found for reported participation.

Discussion

The major goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of participation in the college classroom. Most prior research has focused on the student as the primary determinant in the frequency of attendance and participation in the classroom without focusing on the impact of

the teacher. This investigation was undertaken to give more of an emphasis to the teacher's role in student participation.

Immediacy

Hypothesis One predicted that there would be a positive relationship between reported class participation and nonverbal immediacy. A positive linear relationship was found between frequency of class participation and perceived instructor immediacy. Students who perceived their instructors as higher in immediacy were more likely to report participating in class. Immediacy increases affect in the classroom (Gorham, 1988) which helps in creating a more comfortable climate. Previous literature regarding class participation has shown that students are more likely to participate when they feel comfortable in the classroom (Fassinger, 1995; Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Wade, 1994). Thus, this finding is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is that the relationship between participation and immediacy is so small. Perhaps students were not reporting participation as much as they were actually doing it. It is also possible that students have different concepts of what constitutes class participation. Though a definition of participation was given on the questionnaire, participants may not have used that definition and may have used one that they already had in mind. For example, participants may have perceived participation as taking notes in class, or contributing to a discussion group, or talking for a few minutes at a time during class. This could have skewed the results if students were thinking of their participation in different ways than the questionnaire was designed to assess. In future research, it may be helpful to have students define participation or for participants to be read the researcher's definition of participation. Then, researchers could code that information to be sure that the students were using the same definition as the one given.

This would assure that students were on the same wavelength as the researcher in their definitions of participation.

Verbal Aggression

Hypothesis Two found that there was a negative relationship between reported class participation and perceived teacher verbal aggression. This relationship also was somewhat small though. The strength of this finding is again surprising. One would have expected a larger correlation between the two variables, given previous research on verbal aggression, negative classroom climates, and participation. Students are less likely to participate in class when they perceive the climate in the classroom as negative (Berdine, 1986). The same possibilities exist with students not reporting on their participation in the manner intended, as previously stated.

Gender Differences

Research Question One inquired about the possibility of males and females differing in their frequency of class participation. Results indicated that gender did not play a role in determining the amount of reported participation. There was no difference found between males and females in the amount of reported participation. Students do not see themselves as participating more or less based on their gender. Perhaps males and females have different ideas on what constitutes participating. This may be assessed in future research by gaining more insight into how students perceive participating in class and testing for gender differences in that way. It is also possible that males and females do participate with a different frequency but do not perceive themselves as doing so.

Limitations

All of the measures included in this study were self-report measures provided by the student. These have been found to be valid and reliable measures in several studies (see McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). However, the possibility of social desirability bias still exists in any self-report instrument. Thus, though the measures here were valid and reliable, there may have been over- or under-reporting of information by student participants.

Though the effect sizes of the correlations in this study were relatively low, these findings can be seen as much stronger when looked at in a different light. It has been shown that up to 80% of the way people communicate is hereditary (McCroskey, Daly, Martin, & Beatty, 1998). Much of this has to do with individuals' intelligence, which may be a large predictor in both class participation and attendance. Given these findings, obtaining even a small amount of the variance accounted for by an instructor variable, not a student variable, could be considered substantial, especially in the social science realm.

Implications

Instructors may be unaware of the communication they are engaging in during class. If they can become more aware of these behaviors and the perceptions they are creating in the students' minds, they may be able to increase the level of participation in their classes. Instructors should consider that their students may be more likely to participate in class if they can create perceptions of (a) nonverbal immediacy, and (b) non-aggressive communication, in their students' minds. In support of the research on perceived instructor immediacy, teachers should strive for immediate behaviors in the classroom. The findings reported here, that perceived instructor immediacy is related to whether or not students participate in class, adds to the corpus of recommendations advocating instructor immediacy.

The findings here on verbal aggression were similar to other research regarding verbal aggression in the classroom. It is evident that verbally aggressive communication in the classroom is something that should be avoided. Previous research has shown perceived verbal aggression in the classroom to be related to decreased perceptions of teacher immediacy (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997; Rocca & McCroskey, 1999), teacher competence (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997), and decreased student learning (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). Findings in the present research indicate that instructors should avoid verbal aggression in order to increase student participation in the classroom. It is quite evident that students do not appreciate verbal aggression in the classroom. They appear to show their intolerance of this by choosing not to participate if their instructors are verbally aggressive.

Future Directions

Future research in this area should analyze other instructor communication variables and their role in affecting student participation. Much research has focused on instructor variables and how they affect student learning, but not specifically how they affect participation, which in turn affects learning.

Further, it would be helpful for a meta-analysis or a summary of existing studies on class participation to be constructed and examined as a whole. This could help students and teachers to see clearly the reasons for student participation and what might be done where communication is concerned to increase participation in the college classroom.

The present investigation adds to the existing literature on participation, nonverbal immediacy, and verbal aggression, as well as providing some new information and different perspectives. Participation patterns of college students are influenced by instructor

communication patterns and behaviors, providing further evidence of the importance of the instructor's role in facilitating student behaviors.

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